



NEWS RELEASE

Travis County **STAR Flight**

7800 Old Manor Road, Austin TX 78724

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Firefighting helicopter ready for service

Travis County **STAR Flight**'s aircraft fleet now includes a helicopter that is specially equipped for fighting wildfires, a first for the program and for local and regional flight programs across Texas.

"Travis County is the first area in Texas to receive a helicopter that is outfitted for the primary mission of wildfire observation and suppression," said **STAR Flight** Director Casey Ping. "Our UH-1H aircraft, called SF4, gives us three times the load-hauling capacity of our other helicopters, increased safety for fighting wildfires and enhanced capabilities."

Unlike **STAR Flight**'s other three aircraft (EC-145s), SF4 will not transport patients. Instead, it is reserved for response to regional disasters, as a part of homeland security and in support of Travis County Parks' projects, such as controlled burns in green belts and preserves.

SF4 is a UH-1H (Huey) helicopter with a fixed belly tank that holds up to 325 gallons of water, much more than the EC-145's 130-gallon attached Bambi bucket. The fixed tank offers safety advantages for use in urban environments and can hold fire retardant. By using a suction hose, pilots can fill the tank from lakes, ponds, a fire apparatus or using the **STAR Flight** pumpkins, which are transportable water tanks.

In addition, the new aircraft has a greater load capacity. Its maximum take-off weight is 9,500 pounds, compared to the EC-145's 7,900 pounds. If it is not carrying a full load of water, SF4 can transport additional firefighters (hand crews), increasing access to wildfires or disasters in remote or difficult terrain.

SF4 was originally manufactured by Bell Helicopter, served in Vietnam and was later retrofitted for **STAR Flight** by Northwest Helicopters in Olympia, Wash. Travis County purchased the aircraft with spare parts, tools and training for \$2.2 million. Some **STAR Flight** pilots have flown the Huey aircraft during their military careers. All pilots and staff will require initial and ongoing training.

The public is invited to *STAR Flight*'s Open House on Wednesday, May 22, from 3:00 to 7:00 p.m. at their hangar at 7800 Old Manor Road. *STAR Flight* will conduct water

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drops and patient rescue demos, and the public can view and get into the helicopters, including SF4.

STAR Flight's EC-145 helicopters are used for medical transport, swift-water rescue, search and rescue, high-angle rescue, fire suppression/aerial reconnaissance and law safety assistance.

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